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outposts

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CONTRIBUTORS

JENNY JOSEPH
HELEN SPALDING
JULIAN ENNIS
PHILIP HOBSBAUM
ANTHONY CONRAN
FRANK BUCHANAN
HERBERT CORBY
LEWIS HOSEGOOD
ARJUNA LESLIE HOLDEN
KEITH HARRISON
TOM WRIGHT
HARRY GUEST
W. PRICE TURNER
LEONARD CLARK
FREDA DOWNIE
BRYAN A. REED
DOUGLAS GIBSON
DAVID TIPTON
RAYMOND WILSON
JOHN SEYMOUR
BERNARD FOSTER

JENNY JOSEPH

To keep each other warm

TO keep each other warm; eat
To weight the belly, and like cocoons lie
Wrapped away from the street,
Shifting only for comfort
In a long dozing,
Is understandable in dark, in Winter,
And it is almost proper that Tom, Dick, Harry
Or even Paris,
No more should give to or want from Joan, Liz, Mary
Or even Helen.

But oh what grace or pardon shall we get
If before Winter we hibernate:
If eyes not old but tired stare at the coals
While heaving seas bring down the fish in shoals
About our coasts,
And even the old brown lazy-rolling one
Turns in the pond sluggish with unstirred weeds
To gulp the air
That in its channels myriad movement breeds
But we shut door,

Stay close within pretending to be old
Because we cannot bear to face the cold
We know will sweep down through those powerless trees
No country wood but decorative frieze—
They lack protection that can do no harm;
Then soon these walls will stand as square as snow
Whirling before an edgy wind, and so
Neither Tom, Dick, Harry nor even Paris
Joan, Liz, Mary nor even Helen could
Be content, and we not even,
Graceless and desperate, keep each other warm.

HELEN SPALDING

Sound-Track in a Round Church

SAN San
ora pro nobis
San Santo
ora pro nobis:

candles, paten,
altar and closed
talking hands,
ora pro nobis:

standing man,
litany-chanting
San Santo
ebony-throated:
widow with black
shawl and loaded
marketing bag:
ora pro nobis.
Mother, daughter
folded in shadow,
four in a row
absorbed, devoted,
ora pro nobis:
San Santo
chorus, solo,
ora pro nobis.

My thoughts coving
pillar to dome
cannot escape,
caught to echo
ora pro nobis,
shaped to drone
ora pro nobis,
on on

drowsed in stone,
walled in ages,
rounded in darkness.

How shall I go
out of this tide,
out of this chant-beat
ora pro nobis,
the door closed,
daylight outside?
Dare I open
candle to sun,
circle to line,
sound to meaning?
Dare I disclose
lapped words to the chafing wind?

The door latch
rattles; light
cracks, enters,
He stands, the godsend,
gaunt, bony,
grating the threshold,
torn in the coat;
his ears measuring
ora pro nobis
—late by how many
saints? Grace and godsend
breaking my way.

I take his door
to gusty air.

The sky is all rough gold, furrowed, flowing.
I close the circle behind me, seal the dark.
The horizon hills are evening to an outline
against the journeying light,
against this never-returning day,

and I remember: This is how it was,
leaving, standing outside;
this is how it was, turning away.

The path leads over the grass.
The chant sounds phantom now, like tide
in a stranded shell.
And now is nothing.
The path leads down the hill.
Words rise in the thin street and fall,
moving as people move, speaking their lives,
and they are not worn smooth.

Now, when I look back, the circle wall
seems a dark gap in the sky's full gold sail.

JULIAN ENNIS

School Photograph

THE future whirs past them, records them all,
And leaves them standing; cocks its long, round snook
Like a ray gun, shoots, kills them with one look,
And hangs their shrunken corpses on a wall.
Not a boy moves to blot his copy-book;
They grin and bare their teeth; seven tiers tall,
Putting on, as instructed, a brave show,
The school dies with its faces to the foe.

Framed by time, they will never rest in peace;
Even anonymity will elude
The shyest boy, whose nickname writ in grease
By unborn tuckshop hands will stake a crude
Claim on survival, and his epitaph
Be good enough to raise at least a laugh.

PHILIP HOBSBAUM

The Place's Fault

ONCE, after a rotten day at school—
Sweat on my fingers, pages thumbed with smears
Cane smashing down to make me keep them neat—
I blinked out to the sunlight and the heat
And stumbled up the hill, still swallowing tears.
A stone hissed past my ear—"yah!, gurt fat fool!"

Some urchins waited for me by my gate.
I shouted swear-words at them, walked away.
"Yeller," they yelled, "e's yeller!" And they flung
Clods, stones, bricks—anything to make me run.
I ran all right, up hill all scorching day
With "yeller" in my ears. "I'm not, I'm not!"

Another time, playing too near the shops—
Oddly, no doubt, I'm told I was quite odd,
Making, no doubt, a noise—a girl in slacks
Came out and told some kids "Run round the back,
Bash in his back door, smash up his back yard,
And if he yells I'll go and fetch the cops."

And what a rush I had to lock those doors
Before that rabble reached them! What desire
I've had these twenty years to lock away
That place where fingers pointed out my play,
Where even the grass was tangled with barbed wire,
Where through the streets I waged continual wars!

We left (it was a temporary halt)
The knots of ragged kids, the wired-off beach,
Faces behind the blinds. I'll not return;
There's nothing there I haven't had to learn,
And I've learned nothing that I'd care to teach—
Except that I know it was the place's fault.

ANTHONY CONRAN

End of a Past

BUT it is dead, however much you summon it,
Thump on its ribbed heart, ease the black lung
Gingerly into breath;
However hard you persuade me and other people
It merely sulks, or sleeps, or is sick,
However you mock its death,

Perversely it stays dead. And not it alone,
For many habits, times, relationships,
Which were drawn once
Within its compound gravitational field
Now will be lapsed from orbit, swung to anonymity
By that one circumstance.

This your sweet tyranny cannot change, cannot relax:
Life may revisit the cold wastes of the moon,
But now this event
Lies like an absence between us, you and I
Cannot breathe on its flesh, and say, Live:
Life was, and is spent.

It is no use dressing it up, to ventriloquise
Through mechanical lips at the stalls,
Or jerk its nerves
To simulate vainly those of a living child;
The powers of speech, word, gesture, that life gave,
Now death reserves.

Nor is it well done to falsify history,
Changing with intricate double-think its naughty ways
Into the good.
Remember how it was sad; at the best of times,
never happy,
Never claiming more than a little less confusion
Than perhaps it should.

FRANK BUCHANAN

Romeo and Juliet

HE might have come to that tomb a little later,
Found her waking from the friar's 'drowsy humour';
Carried her off to some fair place of exile
From the world's reach and rumour.

But with his dagger to her heart, with the poison cup
In 'her true love's hand', passion consummately
As theirs could only burn out the charnel house
Of time's malignancy.

Anything less would have lost the high frequency
That beacon flashed out of their star crossed fate;
And their world seeing the obsolete waste and shame
Of hereditary hate:

Or might have conditioned them for time to turn
On them in later years: some idle chatter
About procedure perhaps—arranging guests at table,
Or some trivial matter

Of furniture in a room to flare up one day
Like a volcano; and spreading her foiling net
Against his strident taunt, for him to bawl
'How just like a Capulet.'

And she to him 'How like a Montague to shout so.'
And then, beyond the trite instance, for them to rage
And rant against each other the more vehemently
As their passion spent age

Might have nourished a poison deadlier than that
Of the old feud which, like our century's hates,
Would so have fattened on the mitigating formulas
Of its love dates.

HERBERT CORBY

The Witnesses

HISTORY is also to the shy and small.
Protesting you're no character avails
nothing against the bystanders who all
know what occurs even though eyesight fails.

You watch beside the deed, see in a dream
the running murder but you take no part,
too far to blunt the stroke, too close to scream.
They'll swear you knifed the duchess in the heart.

They do not weigh as valid that they used
the green and bottle glass of memory
to make the truth dishonoured and abused:
for them, if they don't say it, it's a lie.

They run the bias, slant the emphasis:
heroes and gods and myths are made like this.

LEWIS HOSEGOOD

The Almond Tree

THERE they lie, the unseen hearts,
littering the ground with their fecundity . . .
Take one up. The deceptive husk,
tanned with the smooth of autumn,
is not the nut, nor is the stone within.
But somewhere in the centre of things,
walled and cemented in this sarcophagus,
is the sweet essential soul of almond—
a pink tree on the skies of spring.

So it is with us; we wear too many rinds.
Clothed against the curious world
we are not ourselves but shells,
and hard in the armour of our defence
we clank unrecognised.
Yet in the floods of love
at last we are known, discarding all—
robes, bastion and dignity—
and there we lie, the unlocked hearts,
cleft like a diagram to God.

ARJUNA LESLIE HOLDEN

Near Blaenau

IN new dark ages, shadows will fall flat,
And bodies too, the flanks unfill,
All hotnesses and humours float
Where bones blink on this emptied hill;
For only lightweight generations will walk out.

They farm hill-corpses where
The mists choke tunnels and choke air,
And quarries wheel inane to bird flight,
Move with simplicity we missed.
Their hearts are bitter and slug-black,

Yet hold us like a clenching fist.
And when those times unscale, unlock,
They will unbend a rip van winkle view
Of a rare crabbed country stretching through
Their backbones, blasting their white hair.

KEITH HARRISON

Autumn Afternoon, with Birds

IT'S an afternoon of birds in a low sky:
Starlings and blackbirds and indifferent pigeons
Drift past the grey square of my window
To flitter in trees or strut on the roof tops.
The year's going down; the last warmth seeps away;
And those who amble in the flat parklands
Inhale the skeleton-promise of the trees—
And as these dark bodies dip, or thrust by
I think of birds in another country:
The straight crane steering himself leisurely
Over the swamp at sundown; the spritely wagtail
Hopping from stone to bough to stone.
I yield no place to myth-birds. Neither phoenix
Roc, nor that Indian swan. I dream of flesh and feathers:
The mollyhawk; and the hungry gull, swinging
To leeward in a pure white curve. Watching.
The concealed bell-bird . . . and the terse bronze-wing
Riding with still wings on the wind-rivers—

And once we watched the blue teal, winding
Their circle down a wide valley
Learning the land's shape for the spring
Before they turned out northward, to the sun.

Here, they wade and fall in the smoky air
Over the stained, custom-built houses
That stretch in tight reefs, unendingly—
Out to Clapham, Fulham, Lavender Hill;
Mostly indifferent pigeons. Still, consider:
A man is not like that. 'Has more', you say;
But having more, has less. Look with what skill
That one kicks off the ledge, flies out
And up to the rooftop; lives in his body,
Does not strive; ruffles his feathers; and seems content
To have written that simple figure on the wind.

TOM WRIGHT

Villanelle

AS I went through the stony wood
I heard the long stilled voices say,
"Time is the traitor in your blood."

We are the ones who understood
that promising is to betray.
The constant is the stony wood.

The freshest flower in its bud
fosters the seedlings of decay.
Time is the traitor in your blood.

Time is the right, and time the rood,
time is the rod you must obey.
The constant is the stony wood.

However high your purpose stood,
however straight you saw the way,
time is the traitor in your blood.

Tomorrow's doubting will intrude
the certainty that is today.
Time is the traitor in your blood;
the constant is the stony wood.

HARRY GUEST

Portrait from Memory

HE'S always eager to a visitor,
Holding the overcoat almost lovingly
That's been where he cannot afford to go,
Not now at any rate, not since they've known
His asthma will not let him work at all
And that his wife can keep her mother and
Himself only in bare necessities.

His fingertips burned brightly once, but now
Leave not even a charred vestige on the paper:
He bends to fill a saucer full of milk
Hearing the cries of "Author!" as he bows;
Brushing his still receding hair he'll pause
As one short sunset phrase is still vouchsafed him;
And in the darkness by his sleeping wife
Shapes still emerge—But nothing lasts. He loves
To talk about the library books he's reading,
Non-fiction mostly. What's it all about?
These great philosophies—and Yoga now—
There must be some clear pattern somewhere. Something
An ordinary man might understand.

His day is circumscribed by bicycle-trips,
The basket full of books and groceries,
Walks through the fields on sunny afternoons,
A half of mild at six in the public bar,
Occasionally a Third Programme play.

He dreams of London sometimes as he stands
Drumming his fingers on the windowsill,
Although eventually there obtrudes
Between his eyes and what they're focused on
His actual reflection in the pane,
The sunken cheeks, the sense of something missing,
A gap, a change of gear, a moment lost,—

And face to face with his remembered talent
He shaves and feeds the cats and washes up.

W. PRICE TURNER

Winter Augury

I WOKE in darkness, hearing foghorns low
across the river. That bruise on silence found
a mate. I felt the buds of prudence bunch and grow
hard: fear slicked its puckering nets around
our bed. I lay beleaguered, wits bewitched,
sure of a friend dead, some warrior down
forever in the abrasive dust, the black clown
drawing a bead along his abacus. Pitched
into vigil so, I reached where dream-stoked heat
enriched the breathing shallows of your calm.
Then, as that rootless yearning stirred its kith
I steered your bold throb of flesh under cautious palm.
I held you, heard those famishing sick horns entreat
again, a goring loneliness lobbed at one's pith
as if death tuned a tremor in the bone,
and I thought of the all-night ferry, the old myth
of Charon, what it would mean to be alone.
While the long rigours of that void accrue
I slip the cramping mesh, with you I sweep
through common elements to the dense keep
of higher frequencies, though I never knew
by what bold stratagem you drew me back to sleep.

LEONARD CLARK

Moment in Time

THE day Hardy died,
January, early on in the year,
I was at home, in Gloucestershire.
Fields were stiff with frost,
Trees in splints, the dangling sun
Crucified;
No bird
Fluttered the dead air.
He was 88, I, not free of boyhood's fire,
Waited my Pentecost;
He had written his last, spare word,
I, at my spring, had scarce begun.
I did not hear the news
Until the evening, when I sat alone in the inglenook;
I had walked to the inn beneath very bright stars,
Past gravestones, churchyard yews,
An empty sheepfold.
My eyes drowned in a book,
I did not see the man who slipped in quietly out of the cold,
But heard him say to one of the regulars,
"Thomas Hardy's dead."
Nothing more was said,
Nobody seemed aware
Thomas Hardy was dead.
But I began to think of the Mellstock choir,
Remembered a drawing of a very old man sitting upright,
With folded hands in a grandfather chair,
Repeated to myself the lines about the oxen in a byre
Kneeling at midnight.
The death itself had no significance.
But now, thirty winters away

From the chill circumstances of that day,
The ground still hard, every bough
Birdless, bare,
I cannot believe it was all chance
That I was there
Sitting in the inglenook the day Hardy died,
For ever since he has been my winter guide;
And it is only a moment in time which separates us now.

FREDA DOWNIE

Ur of the Chaldees

STRANGE people, set in a separate time,
With forward fallen shadows we can trace
And judge unwisely, fumbling too long at
The different death and unhurried mime.

Carefully interpreting a last sigh,
They built a tomb and followed the royal
Protagonist there, and even further,
Being beautifully prepared to die.
Wearing heavy cold cornelian, gold,
And lapiz lazuli, they calmly turned
The poisonous key and sunk to heaven.

The unworn silver ribbon lying rolled
In the girl's pocket and the crumbling hand
Resting on the lyre's strings pricks the heart—
And we who fear to die for nothing,
To journey alone, almost understand.

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BRYAN A. REED

Liaison

THIS was a scandal, one and double,
From the start; never a question
Of two hearts communicating,
But definable—a clinical arrangement.
No new beginning, this was an end
Itself, a meeting, a coming together
Of two predicted stars, their falling
Pre-determined.

Yet no astrology
Could fix their time and place in science;
Astronomy knew nothing of their courses;
No augurer could tell their plain
Geometry, nor minstrel yet
Define their business with romance.

I, believing in a certain future,
Saw them contradict the rules.
Their movements framed a sly collusion;
Their glances hung in the corners of the room
Like shadows; and their parched hands
Made an actor's gestures, as if speeches
Were a matter of pre-ordered lines.
One against one, they played
Their contrapuntal parts like two
Dedicated spies who balance in the plot.
If you say to me this muscle
Is a heart and all such hearts,
When beaten by electric pulses,
Generate emotions like love
And faith, sympathy and tenderness,
Then I give you these two conspirators,
This pair of dusty lovers
Measuring their staged decisions
To conform with fate's mechanics.

You've seen it done before:
The false smile, the artificial shrug,
The calculated nonchalance,
The demanded and affected earnestness,
The vanity of a singular performance;
The conclusions from such sad analyses
That painful ends must lead to bright
Beginnings.

The actors bow and grimace.
The puppets pledge their wooden hearts
To one outrageous blaze of life,
And blame a distant prophecy.
And yet they know it is a business matter,
And each pursues a separate profit.

DOUGLAS GIBSON

With Strangers

WITH strangers it is easier to dream,
While those who know our failures are content
To never see what we would surely seem
To be, we think, if life were different.

So there are questions that we do not ask,
Romantic myths they might regard as lies;
It is with strangers we can drop the mask,
Our secret selves see mirrored in their eyes.

Is this illusion; are we but deceiving
Ourselves and not the strangers with an act;
In their assumed belief find our believing,
And see ourselves in fantasy, not fact?

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DAVID TIPTON

Census Day in Buenos Aires

OVERHEAD an ancient monoplane
anachronistic against the sapphire sky
and fitted with loudspeaker system
gives out instructions and propaganda:
we all must stay at home, it says,
until the census officers have called
and so a National holiday is granted . . .
And all day, with the fragrant scent
of orange blossom, eucalyptus bark;
the singing of red-tailed oven birds,
toads palpitating in the sun,
we stay at home until the forms
have been officially completed.
Then night, and time for rejoicing, fiesta,
and the streets of Quilmes rock with people,
the Rivadavia vibrates with music,
light, and festive mood, and from the domed
yellow-brick cathedral a strident voice
persuades the Catholics to a special mass
with microphones, relays the service
to the pleasure seekers in the streets;
so Latin hymns and tangos mingle
as we sit with an anis in the cafe
remembering that this is Argentina
where Spain is thought old-fashioned
and a census sign of efficient
political activity, where even
the Roman Church keeps abreast
of the times. . . . But in the cafe
there's rumour of revolution
in the Army, ten generals have resigned,
and police are patrolling street-corners.

Argentina.

THE FORTIES TRIED THIS GAME

Out of the North: Harriet Plimpton (O.U.P., 15s.).
Versions from Fyodor Tyutchev: Charles Tomlinson (O.U.P., 10s. 6d.).
Creatures and Emblems: Kathleen Nott (Routledge, 12s. 6d.).
Sunday is a Day of Incest: Michael Bullock (Abelard-Schuman, 8s. 6d.).

MORE of Miss Plimpton's verse works for her publishers than for me: this is a sizeable volume. She is forever greeting the unknown with a (Lee) Masterly cheer. Gnarled hands?

> "Why pity what bears the marks
> Of work it was meant to do."

Dead farmers?

> "There is no need to weep,
> They did their part."

But perhaps we are less likely to give way than Miss Plimpton. She, after all, gets worked up about bees, butterflies, even small plants,

> "The little pine is crusted
> With kernels in the rain",

and, in rather a feminist way, about wives, too:

> "Six times split with the axe of childbirth
> To satisfy a man
> Who knew but one light only, the full moon of desire."

As these quotations probably suggest, Miss Plimpton is rather preoccupied with living up to the magazines to which she is a contributor—they have names like *Poet Lore, Driftwind* and *The Vineyard Gazette* (Edgartown, Mass.)—where they evidently like a poet to Be a Poet.

This often involves pointing a sound moral—

> "For what we love when we are young
> Is all we love when all is said and sung"—

but, most of all, requires that blurry sort of imagery which goes with mystical pretensions:

> "Winter, that iron flower riveting the fence of Time,
> Wounds the petalled fire, the hand reaching for beauty."

What saves Miss Plimpton from being another of Mrs. Jefferson Brick's literary ladies is her love of anecdote. Retailing a good story sometimes makes her forget her cultural obligations. *Witchtrot Road* isn't as compelling as Frost's *A Servant to Serv-*

ants, obviously; but it would not be altogether shattered by the comparison.

> "He began to drink just as soon as he could.
> His mother'd walk clear to Wentworth to bring him home.
> One night she missed him in a blizzard
> And he froze to death in the bog.
> She still went night by night in her old black shawl
> To hunt for him—and Jim with her when it was too late.
> He kept her out of the bog. You could hear them a mile off.
> They had to be taken to the asylum at last, both of them.
> Some folk thought they never really did leave."

This tone—terse and idiomatic—may be found also in *Come by Chance, Darkness in Moonlight* and *Four Captains.* When dealing with incident and character, Miss Plimpton descends from the elocutory heights of the Guild of Boston Poetesses and lapses—fortunately— into the gravelly drawl of a New Hampshire farmer's wife.

Without some such pressure of speech, verse may be obscure, unable to convey the poet's voice to the reader. I can't for example, in *Sea and Rock,* hear Mr. Tomlinson's description of the waves; much less the waves themselves.

> "Mocked, they mass to regain,
> Reclamber the granite sides
> And howl their hopes
> Into the teeth of stone, already torn
> Turned by it backward
> And the enfeebled onrush
> Peters to turbid foam."

By the time we have pushed through line after end-stopped line, we are numbed by the absence of expressive emphases and liable to be baffled by usages such as that of the curiously flat word "peters". This can be self-protective; for example, it tends to prevent the functionless contradiction of "enfeebled onrush" jarring on us as it might otherwise have done. But rhythmic inertia so extreme as to impede close reading is a doubtful asset.

It would be interesting to know what makes Mr. Tomlinson write free verse. His original work owes much to Stevens; but even *The Snow Man,* Yvor Winters's example of Stevens unfettered by metre, to my ear has a definite five-stress pattern running through it—not unexpected in a master of blank verse rhythms. In his own poems, Mr. Tomlinson is sometimes saved, like Norman McCaig, by colourful (though externally applied) imagery. But the prayerful tone which is characteristic of Tyutchev

gives him a little chance here. These translations are most tolerable, perhaps, when metrical. Then, at least, the verse acquires the decision necessary to make its point; as in *Livonian Plains, His Brother's Death,* and *To His Wife.* I quote the last of these in its concise entirety.

> "Punishing God has taken all content
> Of day and dark, of health and open air:
> You he has left for my encouragement,
> That, robbed of will, I am not robbed of prayer."

Miss Nott, we are to understand, is often Wordsworthian; which only goes to show how few people read Wordsworth nowadays. She seems to me to have far more palpable aspirations towards Lawrence. But Lawrence can relate with passionate insight our life to that of surrounding nature; and would, at the same time, recognize such a distinction as an artificiality imposed on us by our industrial environment.

"She went to the wood next day. It was a grey, still afternoon, with the dark-green dog's-mercury spreading under the hazel copse, and all the trees making a silent effort to open their buds. Today she could almost feel it in her own body, the huge heave of the sap in the massive trees, upwards, up, up to the bud-tips, there to push into little flamey oak-leaves, bronze as blood. It was like a tide running turgid upward, and spreading on the sky."

The hope and lyricism of Lawrence's prose in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* makes Miss Nott's verse look wailful, even mawkish; she can only invert a stock pathetic fallacy in order to show her lovers (somewhat pointlessly) lost.

> "So deep we had been walking talking oh my love
> (Of love) so long we had been wont to dally,
> We had no time nor eyes for what went on above,
> We had failed to note we were in rubbish-valley.
>
> "Maybe we thought of wildness in some distant air
> When a torn hand of chestnut skimmed the brow,
> And the sharpsmarting hail, so one would swear,
> Rolled from a slope on which the clouds were snow."

Of course it's unfair to compare Miss Nott's amicable amble with two of the greatest narrative poets in the language; her verse doesn't justify the reference, though her pretensions might. But she offers very little of her own which would render such comparisons irrelevant. Such pseudo-realisation as "torn hand of chestnut" and "sharpsmarting hail"—appearing to define but only

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providing a literary periphrasis—is everywhere in these poems. We are continually being subjected to a humourless rhetoric, a kind of abstract bullying—

"I
Founder in the folly of woods,
Since woods rear once and die"—

Well go on and founder then! we're goaded into retorting. And yet, though Miss Nott is a great one for free verse, like Mr. Tomlinson, she is better in metre. There isn't much in this volume that could be recommended; but in *Amphibian Nature,* despite the inevitable obscurity and rhetoric, we may discover some sign that Miss Nott could come to understand her own emotions, even if she could not grow out of them. The verse groans along reluctantly, as tortured as the depression it presents us with; no more elegant than Mr. Tomlinson's, but more functional.

"Indeed how moping have I sat within
The downcast glimpses of my cage of skin,
All my life and the world's: whose out-of-doors
Gives eyelid light to tell my metaphors:
An else-unknown which they could be or mean
Could I but grow the eye to make it seen."

Another would-be explorer of "instinctive nature" is Michael Bullock. At first you might think it was all a leg-pull.

"Mother, eat my fingers,
Eat my fingers!

The egg of morning cracks.
The yolk of sunlight
Trickles through the trees"

—And scrambles through the scrub into the curling bacon of the bracken, one's tempted to add! I thought all this had gone out with David Gascoyne and the Apocalypse, if not with Harry Crosby. But I suppose 'competent' will become a rude word once more, and Mr. Bullock will cease to lapse into lucidity even as rarely as he does; for example, here.

"The dog-headed shadow on the wall behind me
Creaks in the swaying mantle of the wind . . . "
" . . . a clawlike hand that clutches as it passes,
the jagged oval of an anguished mouth agape."

This is, of course, Eliot gone bad. I should have thought that *Ash Wednesday* would have been an especially profitable study for Mr. Bullock: if he had learned from its dramatic relevance and

economy, he could perhaps have restrained himself from bestowing on us so lavishly his melodramatic properties—bones, shrouds, tall night, tall morning, nude lightnings, splinters of dawn, water ticking like time, the coral darkness of your caves, etc.

The other day I bought a battered anthology of the forties on which some sensitive spirit had scrawled "If this is modern poetry, no wonder poetry is not read today." If Mr. Bullock and his "flowing tide of darkness" flow in much further, it'll be necessary once more to defend modern poetry against the philistines. Only this time we might not be so sure which side to be on. And poetry, as a means of communication might get badly dented in the process.

PHILIP HOBSBAUM.

Straight Lines and Unicorns: John Knight (Cresset Press, 15s.).
The Flooded Valley: Roland Mathias (Putnam, 8s. 6d.).
The Man of Grass and Other Poems: Roy Macnab (St. Catherine Press, 16s.).
Satires and Salvation: Randle Manwaring (Mitre Press, 8s. 6d.).

MR. KNIGHT's poems are varied (and variable) in technique and subject: they range from the admirably terse and straightforward 'Vanessa to Cadenus', secular in its values and tone, to a quasi-religious verse that is often too windily rhapsodic to have the bite and excitement of significant poetry. Although one feels that his basic need is for the reassurance of faith, Mr. Knight, like Hardy, is restlessly teased by an honesty of doubt that leads him into neutrality:

> 'I'll not affirm HE is and, lying, damn my soul.'

Particularly in the relaxed, if not flaccid, monologues on religious themes, Mr. Knight is unhappily derivative, even in style:

> 'night wrapped in an eyebright of time' . . .
>
> 'I remember one sun of day
> they took me into a deep dark of house . . . '

and, apart from Thomas's tricks, there is some diluted Eliotesque, crossed with Synge's prose. One gets an impression, strengthened by the numerous dedications, of a coterie poetry. Nonetheless, Mr. Knight has a real enough gift. It will be better developed if he more carefully distinguishes between fancy and imagination and avoids so literary a symbolism.

A very different poet is Roland Mathias, whose feeling for strength in rhythm and word can be impressive. His themes are the Welsh countryside, its traditions and its people, and if his severe regionalism narrows his appeal, at least it supplies a certain depth to his writing. An insistent Saxon vocabulary, frequent compound epithets and some dialect usage remind one of Hopkins at times, but, unlike Hopkins, he has little brilliance of image and so little flexibility that his poems often seem muscle-bound. The vernacular vigour of 'A Letter' shows him at a very worthwhile best; in an elegy 'For Warren Davies' he hammers home the feel of a character; but in general his poetry is descriptive of landscapes informed by psychological states regretably obscure; for instance:

> ' The alphabet I utter
> Graves every mound with a title to blame. In its vowels am I
> too mort and afraid.'

It is thirteen years since Mr. Macnab's first volume appeared, but 'The Man of Grass', if it shows a greater variety in its themes, hardly indicates any development in technique: indeed, two poems from his 'Testament of a South African' reappear here without seeming in the least out of place. Much of the poetry is a kind of traveller's album of places and impressions: like snap-shots, some of the poems look faded, their conventional settings oddly outmoded. Mr. Macnab too often remains content with a lame poeticism:

> 'O Europe and Africa,
> Whose children both we are . . . '

However, in some of the poems on his native South Africa there is a greater vitality of image and word. Here, for example, is the Zulu, degraded to 'the bowels of the town':

> 'From the top of a garbage pit
> He surveys his two or three weeks,
> While a tubercular hunger
> Slowly consumes him.'

Mr. Manwaring's second volume, 'Satires and Salvation', reflects and moralises in a way that might please unexacting readers of verse, but fails to rise to the level at which criticism can genuinely begin.

RAYMOND WILSON.

Best Poems of 1958 (Borestone Mountain Poetry Awards 1959). (Pacific Books. $3.50.).

OWING to the tragic death of Dr. Robert Thomas Moore (founder of Borestone Mountain Poetry Awards) in 1958, the eleventh annual volume in this series is late in making its appearance, but we are fortunate to have it at all, and it is indeed good to know that the annual awards and volumes of Borestone Mountain are to be continued. This collection of poems selected from magazines of the English-speaking world certainly maintains the high standard set up by its predecessors; and the new Managing Editor is to be congratulated on the way in which he has performed his unenviable task, taking over in mid-stream, so to speak.

The prize-winning poems for 1959 are: first, *The Dolphin Children* by Joan LaBombard; second, *Impressions of My Father* by Marcia Masters; and third, *The Animals* by Josephine Jacobsen. However, to judge by the quality of the other poems in the volume, the Editorial Board must have found it extremely difficult to decide how the awards should be made. I was particularly impressed by Paul Henderson's *Elegy* (taken from New Zealand's magazine *Landfall*), Lisel Mueller's *The Queen of Sheba Says Farewell,* Robert Hillyer's *Assembling the Family,* Paul Dehn's *Siren Song* (from *Outposts*), and May Sarton's *Spring Planting.* Britain is well represented by Ted Hughes, Robert Graves, Vernon Watkins, Paul Dehn, Norman MacCaig, Phoebe Hesketh, Day Lewis and several others.

After reading such anthologies as *New Poems* (sponsored by the P.E.N.) and the Guinness Book of Poetry, one is surprised by the wide range of subject, mood and style to be found in the Borestone Mountain collection. One can only assume that it is due to the fact that the Editors, being so widely dispersed, are compelled to work individually rather than as a group in close collaboration, so that no single Editor can dominate the Board as a whole or exercise an undue influence.

It may be of interest to readers to know that the Editors are Waddell Austin (Managing Editor), Lionel Stevenson (Chairman), Howard Sergeant (British Commonwealth), Hildegarde Flanner, Gertrude Claytor, Frances Minturn Howard, and Gemma d'Auria.

JOHN SEYMOUR.

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Dialectic: James Hinton. 3s.
Death and Change: Erica Johnson. 3s.
Time Remembered: Kenneth Prosser. 3s.
Rhyme's Vexations: Nicodemus. 3s. 6d.
The Rocklestrakes: D. M. Black. 3s.

All Published by OUTPOSTS PUBLICATIONS

IN their first collections, James Hinton and Erica Johnson have both subjected themselves to what must be one of the most formidable tests of the poet—the long poem or sequence—and if neither of them has been entirely successful in this medium, they acquit themselves with credit. Mr. Hinton, whose *Dialectic* is in five sections and a short synthesis, does not seem to have assimilated his material sufficiently for his purpose. He has ideas to work out, but tends to lose track of them in his enthusiasm for wordy argument, but his sense of imagery usually carries him through the difficulties he creates for himself. Miss Johnson's sequence of nine poems, *Death and Change,* is better balanced and has a richer pattern, yet she deals with some of the questions posed by Mr. Hinton from a more personal angle.

Time Remembered is Kenneth Prosser's second booklet in this series and it provides evidence of development towards a clearer, less clotted, style: though the unusual method of punctuation is still a little confusing at times. Mr. Prosser is inclined to be introspective and most of his poems of protest reflect his attitude to modern society. The best poem in this collection, *Lawrence of Arabia,* is also the most objective.

Rhyme's Vexations is a collection of lyrics in traditional form on a variety of clearly-defined subjects—Faith, Love, Pain, Death, etc.—all informed by an almost stoic acceptance of experience. If not outstanding, these are competent poems and the author is to be respected for his consistency.

Mr. D. M. Black has an extraordinary command of language and a vivid imagination which occasionally runs away with him. There are three poems in this booklet (*Incident, The Scholar, The Rocklestrakes*) which appear to have some underlying significance, but which merely leave the reader in doubt as to whether they are intended to be allegorical or not. But there can be no doubt whatever about his talent, displayed at its best in such descriptive pieces as *St. Andrew's Bay.*

BERNARD FOSTER.

NOTICES

OUTPOSTS PUBLICATIONS. The latest additions io the *Outposts* Series of booklets are: *The Rocklestrakes* by D. M. Black, *The Skull in the Mud* by D. J. Livingstone, *On Approval* by Kevin Crossley-Holland, *A Journey* by Erica Johnson, and *Young Kingdom, Come* by Gillian Mills.

THE DULWICH GROUP. Monthly readings of poetry are held by the Dulwich Group at the Crown & Greyhound, Dulwich Village, S.E.21, on the last Wednesday of each month (the March meeting, however, will be held on 22nd March). The Crown & Greyhound is easily reached from North Dulwich Station (London Bridge) and Herne Hill (Victoria). It is close to the No. 37 bus route.

Contributors to OUTPOSTS are always welcome to the platform of The Contemporary Poetry and Music Circle if application is made in good time. Readings are arranged for both new and established poets, and for critics, editors, and anthologists. Meetings are held on the second Monday of every month from October to May inclusive at 7 p.m. at 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, Kensington Road, London, W.8. They are freely open to the public, but a collection is taken. Monthly programmes and inquiries: Alec Craig, 4 Princes Court, Worsley Road, London, N.W.3.

THE HEADLANDS, poems by Howard Sergeant (published by Putnams) can be ordered through local booksellers or obtained from this address, price 8s. including postage. "Those who despair of the aims and values of modern poetry should ponder Mr. Sergeant and think again." *Contemporary Review.*

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